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ABSTRACT

The Kennedy Children's Room and Family Center Program was developed by the joint endeavors of faculty from West Virginia University and personnel at the Kennedy Center Federal Correctional Institution, Morgantown, West Virginia. Goals are (1) to develop and implement a model training program which focuses on fostering and enhancing effective family and parenting skills for inmates, spouses, and children in order to make the transition from incarceration to the home and family a smoother one; and (2) to disseminate information about the training program and to provide demonstrations of the model for other federal correctional institutions with similar populations. The program consists of two components: the "Children's Room" and the inservice training sessions. The Children's Room program is educational in nature, resembling any quality early childhood program with parent involvement in all aspects. The training sessions are available to three distinct groups of inmates identified by a needs assessment. Feedback thus far is positive, indicating that inmates and their families have been successful in identification and application of knowledge and skills related to positive family interactions and effective parenting skills. The model is being refined and further developed for dissemination. (Author)

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FIRST YEAR RESULTS OF RESEARCH IN THE KENNEDY CHILDREN'S ROOM AND FAMILY CENTER PROGRAM: KENNEDY CENTER FEDERAL CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION MORGANTOWN, WEST VIRGINIA

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Abstract

The Kennedy Children's Room and Family Center Program was developed by the joint endeavors of faculty from West Virginia University and personnel at the Kennedy Center Federal Correctional Institution, Morgantown, West Virginia. Goals are 1) to develop and implement a model training program which focuses on fostering and enhancing effective family and parenting skills for inmates, spouses, and children in order to make the transition from incarceration to the home and family a smoother one; and 2) to disseminate information about the training program and to provide demonstrations of the model for other Federal Correctional Institutions with similar populations.

The program consists of two components: The "Children's Room" and the In-service Training Sessions. The Children's Room program is educational in nature, resembling any quality early childhood program with parent involvement in all aspects. The Training Sessions are available to three distinct groups of inmates identified by a needs assessment. Feedback thus far is positive, indicating that inmates and their families have been successful in identification and application of knowledge and skills related to positive family interactions and effective parenting skills. The model is being refined and further developed for dissemination.

The Kennedy Children's Room and Family Center Program is a model training program for inmates and their families at the Kennedy Center Federal Correctional Institution, Morgantown, West Virginia. Presently the Kennedy Center which is a minimum security Federal Correctional Institution, serves an all male inmate population averaging approxmiately 26 years of age.

The program is in operation during visiting hours at the Center which are held from 8:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. on Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays. Spouses and children often travel hundreds of miles to be with inmates during this time. Visiting children are young, mostly preschool age. Until implementation of the Children's Room and Family Center Program, inmates and their visitors including children spent this time in one large visiting room. Children usually brought toys or games for entertainment while the adults talked or watched television. Observations by correctional officers in the visiting room showed evidance that children soon became tired or bored and frequently displayed aggressive behavior such as hitting and fighting.

Other federal correctional institutions throughout the Country provide similar accommodations for inmates, spouses and children during visiting hours. However, some have begun to adopt models which purport to provide child care and parenting skills. One such model is Sesame Street. This model provides a children's workshop area separate from the visiting room to provide opportunities for inmates and their guests to have a more meaningful visiting experience. The program consists of viewing educational TV programs and engaging in related play activities designed to provide learning experiences. The Sesame Street model uses inmates to work with the children. These inmate Child Development Associates (CDA) may receive college credit for participation in the program if arrangements can be made with nearby junior or community colleges. It is assumed that post release employment opportunities or continued educational experiences

may result from participation in the Sesame Street program. Child Development Associate training is important for those seeking positions as caregivers such as public school classroom aides or in preparation for other paraprofessional types of jobs. However, since the Kennedy Center Federal Correctional Institution consists of an all male inmate population, it is unlikely that this population will seek positions upon release that are generally limited to paraprofessionals and which pay little if any beyond the minimum wage. Based upon the results of a needs assessment survey administered to inmates and their families, the Kennedy Children's Room and Family Center Program was developed and implemented on June 14, 1980 through the joint endeavor of Dr. Hazel E. Marsicano from the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, College of Human Resources and Education, West Virginia University, and personnel from the Kennedy Center Federal Correctional Institution. The overall program is intended to provide opportunities for inmates and their families to share in a variety of learning experiences and to keep open lines of family communication and understandings. It focuses on enhancing the knowledge and skills of participants in all aspects of human development and emphasizes the importance of the family as a support system. Family interrelationships are viewed as a means for enhancement of the individual's total development - social, emotional, cognitive, and physical.

Goals of the program are:

1) to develop and implement a model training program which focuses on fostering and enhancing effective family and parenting skills for inmates, spouses, and children in order to make the transition from incarceration to the home and family a smoother one; and
2) to disseminate information about the training program and to provide demonstrations of the model for other Federal Correctional Institutions with similar populations.

Specific objectives for inmates and their families include:

1. Identification of the various roles of individuals within the family and as members of a total support system.
2. Identification and acceptance of feelings, and discussion and demonstrations of appropriate ways to express emotions.
3. Identification, discussion, and demonstration of prosocial behavior and skills involved in participation in appropriate social interactions.
4. Identification and demonstration of a variety of techniques for behavior management and behavior modification.
5. Identification and demonstration of knowledge and skills that enhance physical development.
6. Identification and demonstration of knowledge and skills essential for enhancement of cognitive/intellectual development.
7. Identification and demonstration of knowledge of the principles of good health and nutrition.
8. Identification, discussion, and demonstration of knowledge and skills essential for effective positive family interrelationships in every day family living.
9. Recognition of available social services and their roles in supporting family needs.
10. Identification and demonstration of effective family and parenting skills.

The program consists of two components: 1) The Children's Room and Family Program Center, commonly referred to as the Children's Room, and 2) The Inservice Training Component.

The Children's Room Component is based on the belief that children and their parents need to be active participants in the important family-human developmental

process. As parents work and play with their children in the Children's Room they communicate not only knowledge and intellectual understandings, but also feelings and attitudes. Young children frequently model the behavior of important adults in their environment. Parents serve as effective role models in this socialization process.

The program is educational in nature and encourages children to be active participants in their learning processes. Materials and equipment arranged in centers similar to those found in any quality early childhood program allow children to choose from a variety of experiences to enhance their growth and development in social, emotional, physical, and intellectual areas. It is assumed that children learn at different rates and in different ways, therefore learning experiences must be planned to allow for these divergent rates and learning styles. Materials and equipment must also meet the developmental needs and interests of Participants. Thus far, on any given day, the chronological age span may be as diverse as 14 years with children as young as 15 months and including those who have reached their 15th birthday. The room takes on an atmosphere similar to that of a large extended family. Adults function as teachers, facilitators and guides while older children help younger ones with appropriate ways to use materials and equipment. A great deal of modeling occurs between and among children as well as between children and adults. All learn from the interrelationships with materials and others.

A qualified teacher is responsible for carrying out the daily program in the Children's Room. She prepares the environment and provides structure for the children, including child-parent activities. She demonstrates effective teaching strategies and ways to select appropriate materials for individuals. The teacher serves as an appropriate role model for parents in guiding and managing children's behavior. Feedback indicates that parents frequently imitate the teacher's be-

havior at home with their children and report that these experiences help them to help their own children. It also serves as an effective technique in reinforcing the positive attitudes of parents' toward their children and in providing insights into their child's development, thereby assisting them in setting realistic goals for their child(ren).

A category system has been developed to assess the progress of participants. Children are observed to determine levels of development and changesin behavior which occur as they interact in the Room. Parents, the teacher, and program director confer regularly to discuss the children's progress and to plan future activities. Some children attend on a regular week-end basis while others come once a month or even less frequently. Interviews with parents indicate that children who disliked coming to visit their fathers before implementation of the Children's Room, are now eager to visit. This has had a significant impact on the attitudes of the entire family. It makes the family visitation a pleasant experience for all. In addition, interviews with correctional officers in the visiting room and other inmates who do not have children have reported that the availability of the Children's Room has enhanced the quality of the visiting experience for all inmates and their families. Responses to the interview include:

1. "The children's room is a great concept. I think it's helpful to both parents and children. It keeps them occupied, you know how children are, especially in that surrounding and everything."

2. "I think it's a good thing, it affords time for the parents to talk. I think it's good for child development."

3. "I like the room, I can play with my child and I can also observe her behavior with other children - you can see how she is."

4. "People are doing a good job, they seem well trained to work with children."

5. "Them brats aren't all over the place anymore."

6. "Cuts out the monotony of the visit for children. Takes out some tension of the visiting room and it's a lot less tiresome for the children. Mine like it - three have used it."

The Inservice Training Component consists of a series of six training sessions developed and conducted by the director for three groups of inmates identified through the needs assessment.

1) Inmates and spouses who visit regularly attending a minimum of six consecutive one-hour training sessions held at a time other than visiting hours.

2) Inmates who do not receive visitors attending a minimum of six consecutive one-hour training sessions held at a time other than visiting hours.

3) Inmates and spouses who visit occassionally attending a minimum of three two-hour sessions held at a time other than visiting hours.

The training sessions focus on all aspects of human development and the knowledge and skills necessary for enhancement of family living and parenting. Video tapes of children and their families interacting in the various activities of the Children's Room have been monitored and refined to provide information and to demonstrate these skills. Each of the six sessions consist of a handout identifying the topic(s) for discussion with goals and objectives to be achieved; a video tape to provide background information and to demonstrate ways in which appropriate family interaction fosters total human development - social, emotional, physical and cognitive/intellectual; and a worksheet to be completed by participants at the end of the session. The topics for the training sessions are:

1. Orientation
   Video Tape #1 of The Growing Family:
   Introduction to the Kennedy Children's R-om and Family Program Center

2. Emotional Development
   Video Tape #2 of The Growing Family:
   Learning About "Self" and Feelings

3. Social Development
   Video Tape #3 of The Growing Family:
   Social Interaction Skills

4. Models for Effective Behavior Management and Discipline
   Video Tape #4 of The Growing Family:
   Discipline and Behavior Management Skills

5. Physical and Intellectual Development
   Video Tape #5 of The Growing Family:
   A. Physical and Motor Development
   B. Supporting Intellectual Growth

6. The Family Living and Learning Environment
   Video Tape #6 of The Growing Family:
   Setting the Stage for Living, Learning, and Growing Together

Thus far, pilot studies have been completed for groups one and two - inmates and spouses who visit regularly and those inmates who do not receive visitors. Results have been favorable. Inmates and their wives participating in the first pilot program openly discussed the problems and strains on family life cuased by incarceration and resulting in separation of the family. They were able to identify appropriate interaction skills demonstrated in the video tapes and to list ideas they could try at home with their children to enhance the quality of family living. They also reported ways in which they became more aware of and understanding toward the feelings of their spouses and began to talk about their feelings. Overall, not only did they gain insights and understandings about human development and family living but also a realization of the importance of each member of the family as a support system for the others.

Group two, inmates who do not receive visitors, participated in the first four sessions before they actually began to interact with classmates. They ask the names of others in the group and began to seek them out on the compound during the week for discussion of the program. Several borrowed books listed on the training session bibliography and suggested them to peers for reading. During the last two sessions, questions and comments regarding their personal development and family interaction skills were asked openly. Participants began to share ways in which they were able to cope with their situations and to continue communication with their families. Some indicated a lack of support from family members

and expressed a helplessness for dealing with their situations. It was exciting to listen to classmates expressing a sincere empathy for them and offering suggestions to enhance communication skills and a better understanding of the family. As indicated by completion of the worksheets at the end of each session, all participants were able to identify skills essential for self development and effective family interaction. Each listed ideas to try with their own family to enhance the quality of family life and strengthen the family support system. Before completion of the six sessions, inmates began bringing a friend or acquaintance to inquire of the director about a time when the training sessions would be offered again indicating their desire to attend.

At the end of year 1, the Kennedy Children's Room and Family Center Program results are favorable. It appears to be having an impact on the lives of inmates by increasing their knowledge and skills for self development and increasing their understanding of effective family interactions. It has also been successful in enhancing the quality of the visiting experience for inmates and their visitors at the Center. Further research is needed to assess the impact of the program on inmates making the transition from incarceration to the home and family to determine any long range or lasting effects.